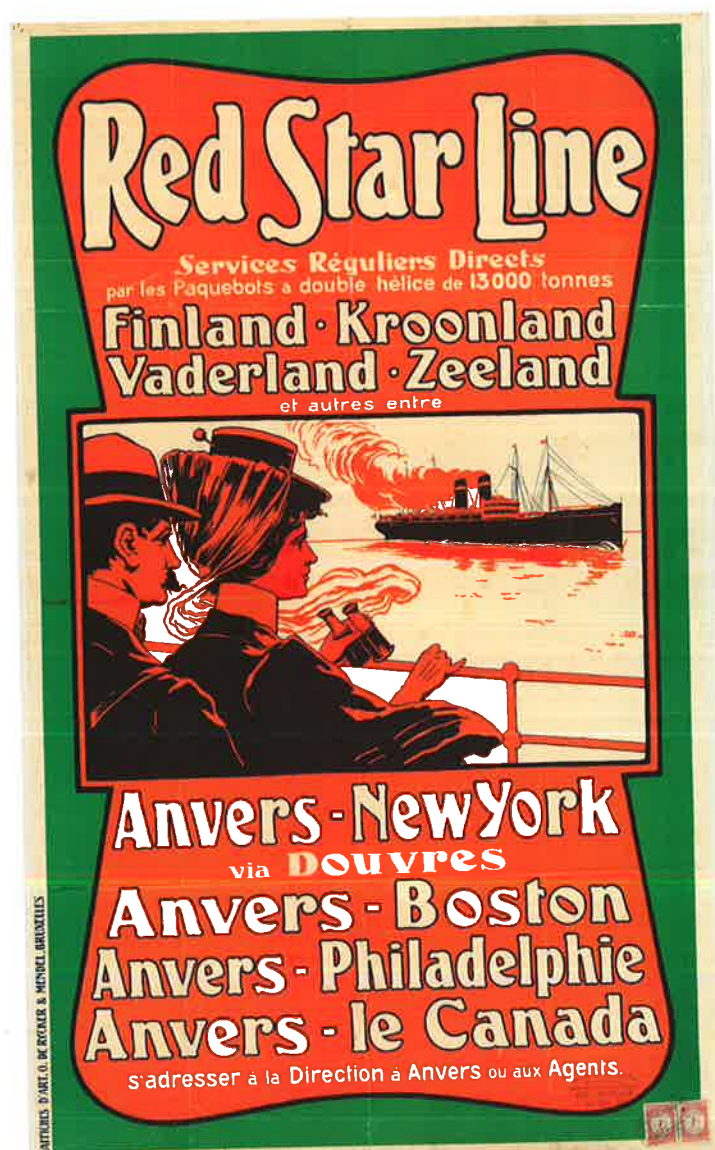


★ TRANS-ATLANTIC MIGRATION AT FULL STEAM AHEAD: A FLOURISHING AND WELL-OILED MULTINATIONAL ENTERPRISE

Torsten Feys

Although the Red Star Line (RSL) is inextricably linked to Antwerp, the history of the shipping company needs to be placed within the context of a trans-Atlantic world, whose components rapidly converged in the 19th century. Prior to this date, the Atlantic sea route had been dominated by its part in the triangular slave trade. Sailing ships first brought refined goods from Europe to Africa. Next, the same ships took slaves, ivory and precious metals to the Americas. There the slaves were sold to make way for a new cargo of goods and raw materials, such as grain, tobacco, coffee, sugar, wood and cotton, which were then shipped back to Europe. With the abolition of the slave trade at the start of the 19th century, this trading pattern was brought to an end. As a result, more and more ships began sailing directly between Europe and America. Initially, many ships set off on their outward journey with their cargo holds only half full. This problem was soon resolved through the transportation of a new kind of workforce: the tens of thousands of European migrants who wished to seek their fame and fortune in the New World. Freed from mobility barriers that tied them to the lands on the old continent, Europeans were lured by promises of high salaries and cheap agricultural land. As early as the 1840s, migrants had become the most lucrative 'goods' on the Atlantic Ocean and there was fierce competition between European and American ports to attract them. In this struggle, the Red Star Line acquired a hard-earned market share. Just how the company managed to establish itself in this competitive business is discussed in the following paragraphs, with a more specific focus on the broader political and economic context. As far as the economic aspects are concerned, particular emphasis will be placed on the impact of the introduction of steam technology and the business-organizational developments that allowed the Red Star Line to grow into a large multinational corporation *avant la lettre*. The political part of the analysis will examine the maritime and migration policies that made this mass exodus possible. The shipping companies were by no means passive actors in these matters. Their efforts to influence policy on both sides of the Atlantic, in order to secure greater freedom of movement for their largest source of revenue - the migrants - will also be assessed.²⁶



Poster of the Red Star Line, 1902, Friends of the Red Star Line, Antwerp

The Red Star Line as the product of the steamboat boom

It is no coincidence that the foundation of the Red Star Line at the start of the 1870s occurred at a moment in time when the trans-Atlantic steamboat was making its complete and very dramatic breakthrough onto the maritime scene. Attempts to provide Antwerp with a fixed steamer line to United States date back to the 1840s. In fact, the very first steamship to leave from the European mainland for America departed from the city on the Scheldt. However, the introduction of this new technology was not without its drawbacks. Steamships were highly capital-intensive and initially ran a greater risk of damage. For this reason, steamer lines did not seem to be economically viable and were only able to survive thanks to heavy government subsidies. It was only after the Inman Line turned to the transportation of migrants in the 1850s that the Atlantic steamship companies began to make a profit. Even so, American sailing ships still continued to dominate migrant transport until the end of the Civil War (1861-1865). After this conflict, the transition to steamships took place very rapidly. The Americans, however, 'missed the boat' and the market for migrant transport fell into the grateful and welcoming hands of the European companies.²⁷

This transition was accelerated by a number of technological innovations, of which the most important were the iron hull and screw propulsion, which replaced the wooden hull and paddle propulsion. This increased the steerability, safety, speed, capacity and profitability of steamships. The introduction of public limited liability companies, with shares that limited the risk faced by investors, also played an important role in this. The suspicions of investors quickly disappeared soon after the American Civil War, when it became clear that the trans-Atlantic shipping companies were making huge profits and paying out dividends of up to 20%. Such was the increasing demand for places on a steamship to the New World that the shipping lines found it hard to keep pace. New lines shot up overnight, like mushrooms out of the ground. The Red Star Line was one of them. In 1861, just five companies with around twenty ships were active on the route to New York. A decade later, sixteen companies with no fewer than 173 ships were fighting for part of the blossoming and lucrative trade in migrants. During this same decade, the proportion of migrants who sailed to the United States on steamships increased from 30% to 97%. The crossing, which by sailing ship had taken on average six weeks to complete, now took only ten days. In short, steamships brought the different continents closer together and stimulated the flow of labour, goods and capital within the Atlantic basin.²⁸

The Red Star Line is a prime example of the trans-national nature of this North Atlantic economy: funded by American owners, sailing with British ships, mainly manned by German crews and flying the Belgian flag. Those who founded the Red



Red Star Line ships on the Scheldt, circa 1925,
Municipal Harbour Company, Antwerp

Star Line, backed by the giant Pennsylvania Railroad Company (PRR), had two main objectives: to breathe new life into the American merchant fleet and to fight the virtual monopoly of New York as the port of arrival for trans-Atlantic steamship lines. With this second aim in mind, the PRR attempted to lure ships to its home port of Philadelphia, from which its railroad network spread across the American continent. Mixed opinions about the most appropriate business structure for this venture resulted in the setting up of two separate lines. The first, the American Line, opened a service to Liverpool under the American flag, despite the additional cost that this imposed under American national legislation for both shipbuilding and the crew. The second line was the Red Star Line, which chose the Belgian flag and the port of Antwerp for its central geographic location, its strong commercial ties and because of the financial and logistical support of the Belgian authorities.²⁹

The economic crisis of the mid-1870s meant that the first few years were difficult. The resultant strong fall in migration, coupled with an enormous rise in capacity, led to extremely fierce competition. A fierce price war ensued, in which tickets for the crossing were sold at near cost price. Several new companies had to cease trading, almost before they had begun. However, the Red Star Line managed to hold its ground and fared much better than its loss-making sister company. Even so, the PRR continued to invest in the American Line, counting on a turnaround in American policy towards maritime affairs and immigration. As the only serious American player in the game, they hoped



Poster of the Red Star Line, circa 1910, Red Star Line Museum

in the long run to obtain competitive advantages for shipping under the American flag, and they lobbied aggressively for this in Washington. Red Star Line ships which already sometimes served with the American Line (and vice versa), would then possibly be brought under the American flag. Secretly the other competing European shipping companies tried to prevent this by hiring lobbyists and journalists who influenced politicians and the public opinion. For a time this was successful, but in 1892, a law was passed by Congress which made it possible - as had long been the case in Europe - to grant postal subsidies to ships that were built, crewed and owned by Americans. In addition, engineering alterations had to be carried out to the ships under US Navy supervision, so that they could be used on active military service in times of war. The 1892 act did not achieve its aim to revive the merchant marine under the American flag. The meagre sums paid in grants and compensation did not cover the supplemental costs to operate American vessels. The Red Star Line continued to bring in more profits than the American Line. By then PRR's idea of promoting Philadelphia as an arrival port instead of New York had already long been abandoned. Shortly after both lines opened, virtually all their ships docked in the Big Apple.³⁰

The Red Star Line as a part of a whole: shipping cartels and mergers

To neutralize the cut-throat competition experienced during their early years, the American Line and the Red Star Line sought a rapprochement with their major rivals. The American Line, which was above all active on the British and Scandinavian routes joined the shipping cartel that had been set up by the largest British shipping companies. This North Atlantic Conference regularly brought together the directors of these companies to discuss prices, routes, advertising campaigns, commissions and sales conditions for the different migration agents. The largest lines on the European mainland - the Holland Amerika Lijn (HAL), the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (CGT), the Norddeutscher Lloyd (NDL), the Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt-Actien-Gesellschaft (HAPAG) and the Red Star Line - followed this example by setting up the North Atlantic Steamship Association. Mutual distrust between the cartel partners was at first too great to ensure the stability that all had hoped to achieve. Price wars continued to be the order of the day and forced the usual third-class price of \$25 down to the cost price of \$10. It was only at the beginning of the 1890s, when the lines reached agreements for longer multiyear periods which now included pre-determined market shares according to quotas, that the association finally began to work. The British lines failed to achieve this same level of cohesion and as a result lost their position of dominance in the migrant market to the continental

Table showing the main trans-Atlantic shipping companies by cartel before 1914³¹

	Founded	European home port	Flag
CONTINENTAL LINES			
Compagnie Generale Transatlantique	1864	Le Havre	French
Hamburg Amerika Linie (HAPAG)	1847	Hamburg	German
Holland Amerika Lijn	1872	Rotterdam	Dutch
Norddeutscher Lloyd	1857	Bremen	German
Red Star Line	1872	Antwerp	Belgian
Austro-Americana	1903	Trieste	Austrian
Canadian Pacific Line	1903	Antwerp	Canadian
Russian American Line	1906	Libau	Russian
BRITISH-SCANDINAVIAN LINES			
Allan Line	1854	Glasgow & Liverpool	British
American Line	1873	Liverpool & Southampton	American
Anchor Line	1856	Glasgow & Liverpool	British
Canadian Pacific Line	1903	Liverpool	Canadian
Cunard Line	1840	Liverpool	British
Dominion Line	1870	Liverpool	British
Guion Line	1866	Liverpool	British
Inman Line	1850	Liverpool	British
Norwegian American Line	1913	Bergen	Norwegian
Thingvalla/Scandinavian American Line	1880	Copenhagen	Danish
Swedish American Line	1915	Göteborg	Swedish
White Star Line	1870	Liverpool & Southampton	
MEDITERRANEAN LINES			
Compañía Trasatlántica Española	1900	Barcelona	Spanish
Fabre Line	1881	Marseille	French
Hellenic Transatlantic Steam Navigation	1908	Patras	Greek
La Veloce	1901	Genoa, Naples & Palermo	Italian
Lloyd Italiano	1905	Genoa & Naples	Italian
Lloyd Sabaudo and	1907	Genoa, Naples & Palermo	Italian
National Greek Line	1908	Patras	Greek
Navigazione Generale Italiana	1881	Genoa	Italian
Sicula-Americana	1907	Messina & Naples	Italian



Overview of the vessels of shipping companies sailing between Europe and New York, 'Facts for travellers', circa 1897, Red Star Line Museum

lines. A third and separate cartel was organized to carve up the blossoming Mediterranean market. At first, the British and continental lines had the largest share in this market, but after the turn of the century were ousted by new - mainly Italian - lines, who gradually took over the leading role in this Mediterranean Conference (see table). In 1908, the shipping companies organized an umbrella Atlantic Conference, which was designed to reinforce and perpetuate general harmony.³²

The impact of these cartel agreements was wide-ranging. Firstly, the agreements ensured more stable prices, which steadily increased to \$40 in the years before the First World War. This corresponds to roughly \$1,000 at today's prices.³³ Also the commission paid to migration agents per ticket sold was stabilized and set at \$2. The shipping companies were now in a position to impose their will on the independent migration agents on both sides of the ocean. These agents not only sold tickets for the sea crossing, but they usually arranged railroad transport to and from the departure and arrival ports as well. This transformed trans-Atlantic migration into a door-to-door service. But it did not stop there. In addition to travel advice and tickets, the agents also provided all manner of services that were required by migrants. The majority of migration agents were also bankers, who could arrange money exchanges, money transfers, loans, savings accounts, etc. Some provided accommodation *en route* and at the final destination. Both before the departure and on arrival, they helped the migrants with all kinds of official documentation and with the sale and purchase of personal goods, property and land. Some functioned as go-betweens to arrange for jobs. They also made sure that the migrants would still feel a bond with their native country in their new home port, by distributing newspapers in their mother tongue, typical products from the home front, and so on. In a nutshell, the network of trans-Atlantic migration agents provided for all the needs of migrants and contributed in no small measure to the formation of the Atlantic world.³⁴

The stability created by the cartel agreements resulted, as intended, in larger profits, which translated into higher reserves, bigger write-offs and better dividends. These lucrative dividends attracted fresh capital, which in turn allowed further investment in new and better equipment. This benefited the comfort of both the migrants and the cabin passengers. As a result of price setting and the division of the market into quotas, competition became more focused than ever before on larger, faster ships, providing better quality services. Although this was obviously of interest to the migrants, the policy was largely inspired by commercial motives. The migration process was stimulated first and foremost by the success of early pioneers. This led to the formation of chain migration patterns, whereby new adventurers followed in the footsteps of family and friends. This meant that word-of-mouth advertising had a major impact on bookings. A satisfied custom-

er would most likely recommend the company to the people he knew and would book again for himself in the event of a temporary visit or definitive return back to his homeland.³⁵

The first Red Star Line ship, the 'Vaderland', had a capacity of 2,750 tons, with space for 70 first-class and 800 third-class passengers. Forty years later, when the 'Belgenland II' was launched, the capacity had increased tenfold, and the ship was able to accommodate 600 first-class, 350 second-class and 2,000 third-class passengers. At first, the migrants were berthed in large communal sleeping quarters. Their meals were taken in small dining rooms and they had limited sanitation. By the mid-1880s, second-class facilities were generally available for the better-off migrants, budget tourists and less affluent businessmen. For an extra \$10, they could make the crossing in a cabin (complete with washbasin!), which they shared with 2 to 8 other people. They also had the use of a communal smoking room and improved dining facilities. By the turn of the century, the majority of lines were using second-class accommodation as a benchmark for their third-class passengers. It was only during the peak season in the months between April and August that some companies, including the Red Star Line, still crammed passengers into communal sleeping quarters for 12 to 24 persons. Second class was likewise upgraded, but there remained a world of difference with the luxurious first-class facilities, which were equal to anything that could be found in the most prestigious hotels. Some cabins were divided into sleeping quarters and living quarters, with additional access to an imposing dining room, smoking lounge, library, bar, shop, nursery room, sports hall and sometimes even a swimming pool. This ensured that the wealthier passengers were able both to relax and to socialize freely. The restaurant service was also of the very highest gastronomic quality, but the menus in all the different classes became increasingly varied and extensive as time passed.³⁶

The success of the cartels inspired John Pierpont Morgan to enter the world of commercial shipping, which he did by founding the International Mercantile Marine Company (IMMC). He had already made a name (and a huge fortune) for himself by buying up railroads and increasing their profitability through a system of mergers. His corporate strategy was to consolidate as many steps of the production process as possible - from raw materials to final sales - into his own hands. It was strategy he applied with equal vigour to the electricity and steel sectors, and now it was the shipping industry's turn. Many people in the business world and beyond viewed these increases in scale with suspicion and accused Morgan of seeking to establish monopolies. The IMMC, which was formed in 1902 in the wake of the Spanish-American War, confirmed these suspicions. This conflict exposed one of the greatest potential weaknesses of America as a nascent superpower; namely, the lack of ships sailing under the national flag. Working together with the owners of the American



Dining room for third-class passengers on board the 'Vaderland', circa 1905, MAS collection, Antwerp



Third-class dining room on the 'Belgenland', 1925, MAS collection, Antwerp



Calendar of the International Mercantile Marine Company, 1903,
Red Star Line Museum

Line and the Red Star Line, Morgan gambled on there being a radical change of course in US maritime policy, fuelled by an upsurge of American nationalism.³⁷

However, the very costly construction that Morgan set up to combine the interests of the Red Star Line and various other American and British companies was not able to acquire all lines he needed to make his strategy successful. As a result, the IMMC disrupted the harmony between the lines and actually caused a price war. To make matters worse, the expected subsidies were voted down in Congress. Morgan's plan to bring all the ships in the Atlantic under the American flag and to rationalize the operation of the different lines was gradually falling to pieces. Competition with the remaining independent lines soon drove the IMMC into the red. Morgan was unable to find any way out of the hole he had dug for himself: his giant conglomerate remained unprofitable. It eventually underwent a massive reorganization during the First World War. In the meantime, the lines that were not part of the Morgan empire fared well. After the short-lived price war in 1904, the cartel agreements were honoured. These produced good profits for migration, tourism and business traffic, all of which reached record heights.³⁸

The American immigrant market

A large part of the ticket sales for migration crossings actually took place in America, not in Europe. Family or friends who had already settled in the US often arranged and paid for the passages of acquaintances in Europe who wanted to follow in their footsteps. The largest profits made by shipping companies such as the Red Star Line were on the sale of pre-paid third-class tickets. To regulate this market, the representatives of the lines met in New York, where the largest companies had their head offices in the most prestigious streets of Lower Manhattan. This narrow geographical concentration meant that the representatives could meet more frequently than in Europe to conclude cartel agreements for the flourishing American market in trans-Atlantic passenger shipping. Even so, the price of the pre-pays was broadly linked to going-rates for tickets in Europe. Any attempts by the shipping companies to charge higher prices in United States were immediately undermined by the agents. If the difference became too great, the agents circulated order coupons for tickets at cheaper European rates, thereby undercutting the sale of American pre-pays. As a result of the roughly comparable ticket prices and the substantially higher wages in the US, it was much easier to save the necessary money for the transport costs there.³⁹

Many employers also bought pre-pays in response to what they saw as the large and growing demand for labour in the United States. In the event of any shortage in the labour market, they arranged to contract new workers directly in Europe and were

ready to provide them with a ticket for immediate departure, if or when the need arose. Under pressure from the American trade unions, it had already been forbidden by a law of 1884 to enter the US as an immigrant with a pre-existing contract of employment. The unions were worried that cheap European labour would be brought in during strikes to undermine protest actions, put pressure on wages and keep working conditions poor. However, violations of the so-called 'contract-labor law' were extremely difficult to spot. In practice, employers continued to fund the passage of labourers already under contract via intermediaries, known as *padrones*. Through their trans-Atlantic network of migration agents, the shipping companies provided both a pre-paid ticket and all necessary travel instructions to the migrant in Europe. Once in the United States, the migrants settled their debts with the first dollars they earned from their new bosses.⁴⁰

Over 30% of the total migration flow travelled on pre-paid tickets. In addition, a significant number of the remaining migrants bought their tickets in Europe with money transfers sent from the United States via the same migration agent network. In 1907, approximately 275 million dollars were transferred to Europe. This amount is equivalent to 20% percent of all the new deposits made in savings accounts in the US during that same year. For some European countries, this capital injection became a major part of their economy.⁴¹

A proportion of the money earned in the US was also taken back to the various homelands of the immigrants, either through acquaintances or in person. Returning migrants were a second pillar of the American shipping market. Steamships reduced the distance between the two continents to such an extent that for a substantial number of people trans-Atlantic migration was a temporary or even a seasonal event. The money required to make the crossing could be saved in a few months, or sometimes even in just a few weeks. The high season for migrants returning to Europe began in the early autumn. This flow peaked at the end of November and the beginning of December, with migrants planning their return to coincide with the celebration of Christmas. The organization of so-called Christmas sailings by the shipping companies at the turn of the century illustrates just how well established this practice was. Return immigration fell sharply at the start of the New Year, and the movement in the opposite direction - back to the US - rose to a new peak during the spring.⁴²

The advent of trans-Atlantic tourism

A third major part of the American market was the development of trans-Atlantic tourism. This market blossomed above all in the United States, where a trip to the 'Old Continent' was a well-established phenomenon by the turn of the 20th century. The European capitals of London, Paris, Berlin and Rome were all

RED STAR LINE OFFICES	
DOMESTIC OFFICES	
New York	1 Broadway
New York, Pier 62	North River, W. 24th Street
ATLANTA	Forsyth and Poplar Streets
BALTIMORE	308 N. Charles Street
BOSTON	84 State Street
CALGARY, ALBERTA	Land Building
CHICAGO	127 S. State Street
CLEVELAND	Sweetland Building, Euclid Avenue
DALLAS	Cotton Exchange Building
DETROIT	Majestic Building
GALVESTON	Cotton Exchange Building
HALIFAX	63 Hollis Street
HOUSTON	Hermann Building
LOS ANGELES, CAL.	Security Bldg., Fifth and Spring Streets
MINNEAPOLIS	121 S. Third Street
MOBILE	7 St. Michael Street
MONTREAL	McGill Building
NEW ORLEANS	210 St. Charles Street
NORFOLK	Flat Iron Building
PHILADELPHIA	1310 Walnut Street
PITTSBURGH	Arcade, Union Trust Building
PORTLAND, ME.	1 India Street
QUEBEC	53 Dalhousie Street
St. JOHN, N. B.	108 Prince William Street
St. LOUIS	1101 Locust Street
SAN FRANCISCO	550 Market Street
SEATTLE	610 Second Avenue
TORONTO	41 King Street, East
VANCOUVER	Granville and Hastings Streets
WASHINGTON	1208 F Street, N.W.
WINNIPEG	286 Main Street
EUROPEAN OFFICES	
Great Britain	Mediterranean Ports
LIVERPOOL	30 James Street
LONDON	1 Cockspur Street, S. W.
LONDON	38 Leadenhall Street, E. C.
BIRMINGHAM	63, Temple Row
SOUTHAMPTON	Canute Road
COBE (Queenstown)	Scott & Son, Ltd.
CAIRO	9, Rue Khed
ALEXANDRIA	John Ross & Co., Marina
GIBRALTAR	Thos. Mosley & Co., 138 Main St.
ALGIER	J. Crispo, 4 Boulevard de la Republique
MADRID	Blandy Bros. & Co., Funchal
AZORES	Nicholas Rapada & Co.
ATHENS	Gholman Bros., Place de la Constitution
HAIFA	H. Alonzo & Fils
MALTA	Thos. C. Smith & Co., Valetta
ROME, French, Lenson & Co., 50 Piazza di Spagna	
France	Germany
PARIS	
ABIEF, Travel and Trans. Agency, 9 Rue Scribe	
CHERBOURG	J. A. Lantec et Fils
NICE	Quai Alexandre III, 32
	Agence Lubin
	12 Avenue Felix Faure
	15 Avenue de la Victorie
Belgium	Continental Europe
ANTWERP	22 Rue des Beignes
ANTWERP	10 Rue des Tanneurs
BRUSSELS	V. Bull, Agent, 26, Place de Brouckere
PRAGUE	Vaclavské Namesti 66
MOSCOW	Theatralnaja Ploshchad No. 1
ZAGREB	Trg 1 br 15
BELGRADE	Karagiorgieva Ulica 95
LIHAI	13 Rosenplatz
VIENNA	4 Karntnerring, L.
WARSAW	144 Marszałkowska
STRASBOURG	A Schleiffer, 19 Rue Wimpfeling
BUDAPEST	VII, Barossler No. 15

Overview of the travel agencies of the Red Star Line in the United States and Europe, cruise brochure, 1924, Red Star Line Museum

popular destinations with the well-to-do American bourgeoisie. Using large-scale advertising campaigns, the shipping companies stirred up this desire to travel to maximum effect. The majority of the Red Star Line's advertising budget was spent on promoting first-class journeys. The placing of adverts in newspapers and magazines was supplemented with personal letters to potential customers, as well as the distribution of lithographs, scale models, photographs and pamphlets to quality hotels, travel agents and all manner of trade shows. The Red Star Line also attempted to cash in on the increasing trans-Atlantic traffic associated with prestigious international events. For example, the company profited significantly from the fact that in the years leading up to 1914 Belgium organized no fewer than seven world exhibitions, four of which were universal (Brussels in 1897 and 1910, Liège in 1905 and Ghent in 1913). The shipping companies seized on the opportunities provided by the world exhibitions in Chicago (1893)

J-4599—Printed in U.S.A.

Central Steamship Agency
11-115 East 7th Street
New York

FOREIGN MONEY ORDER RECEIPT		★ Red Star Line ★	TO BE RETAINED BY PURCHASER	
Dec 10 1931		Foreign Money \$50.00		No. R.S. 193323
SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS AT FOOT				
Received from Mr. John Kelly				
Address of Remitter 65 West 192nd St. Bronx				
For Foreign Money Payment of \$25.00				
For Transfer to (Payee) Mrs. John Kelly				
Address 65 West 192nd St. Bronx				
<p>MUST NOT BE ISSUED IN EXCESS OF LIMIT</p> <p><small>It is understood that this remittance is purchased for delivery abroad and that no responsibility will be assumed by the transmitter for delays or errors in transmission caused by conditions beyond control. If the remittance is returned as undelivered for any reason, refund will be made in accordance with New York State Banking Law Nos. 1633, 1775—July 1, 1931.</small></p> <p>NOT NEGOTIABLE</p>				
<p>RED STAR LINE</p> <p>11-115 East 7th Street New York</p> <p>Agent</p>				

Receipt for a money transfer to Poland, 1931, Friends of the Red Star Line, Antwerp

and Saint Louis (1904) to boost tourism in Europe. It also became increasingly common for scientific and academic congresses to be organized alternately on different sides of the Atlantic, as was the case, for example, with the biennial International Congress of Americanists. Trade fairs such as the Leipziger Messe also led to a large number of bookings. The Red Star Line also played on homesickness and rising nationalism amongst migrant communities by organizing excursions on the occasion of independence centenaries, coronations, etc.⁴³

As a result of this blossoming trade in the business and tourist sectors, the services offered by the shipping companies became increasingly diverse. Large companies such as the IMMC, of which the Red Star Line was part, issued their own travellers' cheques and were also active in the money exchange and transfer markets, often having their own dedicated offices. Collaboration with the hotel industry became much closer and some shipping companies even opened their own hotels and boarding houses. The various tourist options were particularly welcome in the winter months, when trans-Atlantic shipping traditionally experienced a dip. Instead of temporarily laying up ships from service, the companies now began to organize cruises to the Mediterranean, either directly under their own management or through large travel agents such as Thomas Cook, which chartered their ships. Due to their success, cruises were soon being organized in summer as well, and moved to other (often more exotic) regions such as the Caribbean and the Baltic Sea. Thematic

cruises were also popular, like Red Star Line's Templers' cruise. In the 1920s, all these different stands coalesced to result in the first large-scale world cruises. The Red Star Line was also active in this market with its flagship the 'Belgenland II', whose slogan was "Don't stay at home in the winter, come with us to the sun!"

The success of the cartel agreements for migrant transport inevitably meant that this would be quickly followed by similar arrangements for first and second class passengers. Here, too, minimum prices were set, conditions for agent representation were defined, agreements for advertising were concluded, etc. However, these agreements did not go so far as to distribute the market on the basis of quotas. It should also be remembered that in spite of the increase in cabin crossings, it was still the migrant passages that continued to generate most revenue. This was not only because the flow of migrants increased after 1900, but above all because the profit margins were higher than for the more demanding cabin passengers.

With the exception of a price war in 1904, the cartel agreements at all levels created relative market stability. The greatest threat to the profit margins was no longer posed by mutual competition between the shipping companies, but by the migration policies that governments implemented on both sides of the ocean. In a period when the nation state was increasingly taking shape and expanding its influence through a far-reaching central administration, the liberal 'open border' policy, which was of such benefit to the shipping companies, was losing ground. The

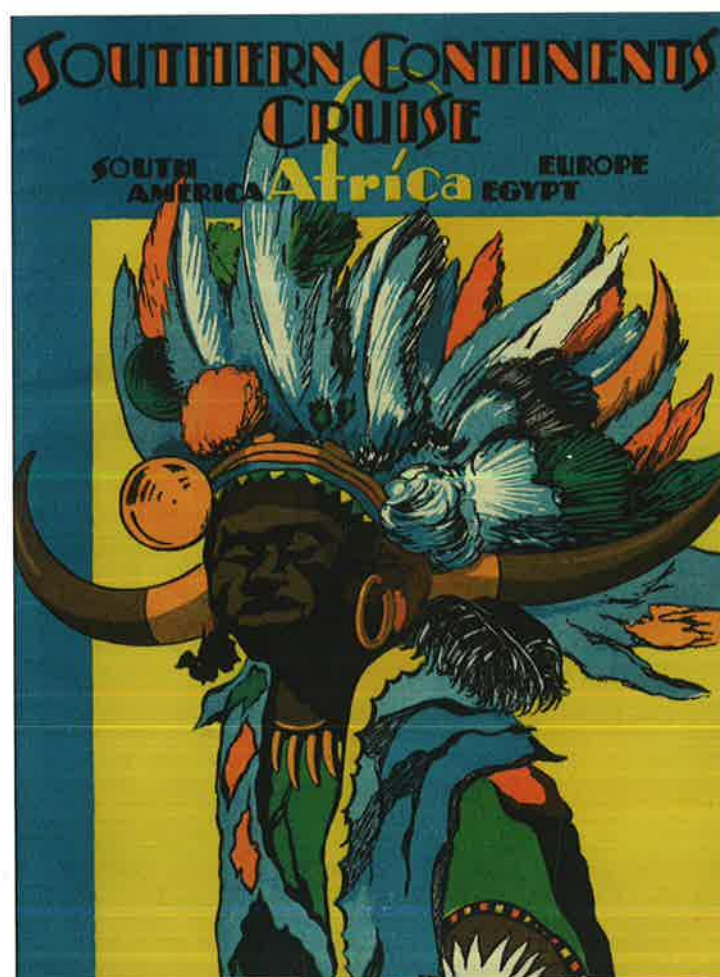
checks on who came and who left a country now came to be seen as a matter of national sovereignty rather than a universally acquired human right. This would lead to new barriers to migration being set up on both sides of the 'Big Pond'.⁴⁴

European migration policy in the light of maritime interests

By the 1860s, the majority of European countries had abolished all passport requirements. The liberal and diplomatic cultures that flourished in the wake of the Congress of Vienna (1815) increasingly removed barriers to the free traffic of goods, capital and labour. However, this was to undergo a gradual change after the economic crisis of the 1870s. In combination with the growing emergence of the nation state, this economic downturn persuaded many countries to return to a policy of protectionism, in order to direct goods, capital and labour in accordance with their own national interests. In Europe this did not immediately lead to restrictions on the emigration of national subjects, but it did lead to measures aimed to direct migration flows through national ports and national shipping companies. In Italy, the passport was reintroduced by the emigration laws of 1888 and 1901, which obliged Italian nationals to leave Europe via Italian ports instead of via the established European ports. In addition, the laws imposed provisions that gave a substantial competitive advantage to Italian steamship lines, to the detriment of foreign companies. Between 1901 and 1908 the proportion of Italian lines active in Italian migrant transport to the United States increased from 8% to 50%. This meant that the profits on migrant transport remained more in Italian hands, whilst trade in general was encouraged through the resulting development of their national ports. The merchant fleet under the national flag was also greatly expanded, with the subsidiary intention that it could be called on to serve as part of the navy in the event of war.⁴⁵

The Red Star Line had fewer interests on the Italian market. Moreover, its Italian agents always found ways to get around the law, so that Italian citizens could still emigrate via Antwerp. The agents distributed information about the best way to reach Belgium and often arranged help through intermediaries *en route*. The migrants were urged not to reveal their final destination to anyone, nor to carry any papers that could link them to the United States. If they were asked about their intentions at the Italian border, they had to reply that they were going to Switzerland to look for work! In return, the agents guaranteed them embarkation in Antwerp without passports.

The Austrian-Hungarian Government soon followed the Italian example. This had much more serious repercussions for the Red Star Line, which was mainly active in the eastern European market. Here, too, passport requirements were rein-



Brochure for a cruise along the coast of South America, Africa and Europe on the 'Lapland', circa 1925, Red Star Line Museum

troduced and new shipping lines were opened from Fiume and Trieste. Partly thanks to pressure from the large German steamship lines, these measures had much less impact than in Italy. And once again, the migration agents were highly inventive in finding their way around the laws, as was also the case in Russia, where passport requirements and emigration barriers had never been lifted. Although these new laws were often contrary to German interests, many actually took their inspiration from Germany, where the first modern border controls were set up after a cholera epidemic that cost 8,000 lives in Hamburg.⁴⁶

The German authorities placed responsibility for the epidemic on Russian Jews, who had emigrated to America through the port. In 1894, control posts were set up on the main railway links on the eastern border with Russia and Austria-Hungary. All baggage was disinfected and the migrants were subjected to medical check-ups. The German Government entrusted these tasks to the



First-class passengers, circa 1910, Friends of the Red Star Line, Antwerp

German shipping companies, which used their position of power to direct migrants who did not yet have a ticket to German ports. Although the quotas set by the cartel agreements guaranteed the Red Star Line a fixed number of passengers or compensation, the control posts weakened the company's position at the negotiating table each time the cartel agreements came up for renewal. Moreover, debates in the German Parliament on the subject of a new emigration law in 1897 showed that the German authorities were considering the banning of bookings by German migrants with foreign shipping companies and obliging all eastern European trans-migrants to depart either from Hamburg or Bremen. As a result of considerable international pressure, the law was never implemented, except for Dutch shipping companies which were prohibited to book third class passengers in Germany under the new law. Even if weakened the 1897 emigration law and the border posts still offered major competitive advantages to the German shippers, although this was offset to some extent by the boomerang effect caused when countries like Italy and Austria-Hungary adopted a comparable migration policy.⁴⁷

The shipping lobby and American migration policy

These European laws were a severe test for the cartel agreements, but they did not lead to a general price war or to the termination of the agreements. Ever increasing migration flows helped the shipping companies to cope with the strains, as did the fact that a large proportion of the bookings took place in the US, since European measures could not be imposed on the American pre-paid market. Nevertheless, by far the greatest legislative threat came from Capitol Hill in Washington. Unilateral decisions by the American Congress to favour national shipping companies or hinder immigration had the potential to do great damage to the existing passenger shipping lines, which sailed almost exclusively under European flags. As a result, the European shippers did not stand idly by on the sidelines, but sought to actively influence American migration policy through a series strong pro-immigration lobbying campaigns in the years before the First World War.⁴⁸

It was not until the 1870s that immigration fell under the control of the federal authorities in the US. Right from the very start, Atlantic shipping interests actively opposed potentially harmful immigration laws. They hired lobbyists to persuade members of the government, Congress and the president that such measures were not in America's national interest. Thanks to their efforts, in 1882 the first general immigration law was strongly toned down, so that the Atlantic migration flow was barely affected. Only lunatics, criminals and people who threatened to be a burden to society were excluded. The smaller Pacific migration flow from Asia, almost exclusively from China, was less fortunate. Based on an openly racist discourse, in that same year Congress passed a law forbidding all Chinese immigration, with the exception of businessmen, diplomats, tourists and students. The absence of strong shipping interests on this less travelled route helped to ensure that migration flows from other Asian countries subsequently suffered the same fate. The fact that a similar racist ideology was only applied to European migration after the First World War is largely attributable to the influence of the Atlantic shipping companies.⁴⁹

Social Darwinism is based on the principle of an evolutionary fight between the different races of people. The science of eugenics claims that a race of people can be improved or weakened by mixing with a superior or inferior race. The white race is supposedly at the top of the social ladder, but there is also a clear hierarchy within this group. Anglo-Saxons, Germans and Scandinavians - who provided the majority of American migrants before the 1890s - are the 'best' ethnic groups. Ethnic groups from southern and eastern Europe are regarded as being of a lower order. On this dubious basis, the call to restrict immigration from these regions to safeguard the purity of the American race grew ever louder as their numbers increased. With this aim in mind, a reading test was put forward as the most diplomatic and efficient method of selection. This would decrease the influx from the less desir-



Cartoon 'Where the Blame Lies', 1891, Grant Hamilton © Corbis

able eastern and southern European countries (which had a high level of illiteracy) by at least 30%, but would leave immigration from traditional areas almost undisturbed. In 1896, Congress approved an immigration law with a reading test for the first time. However, it was only 21 years later, after 17 passages through one of the two chambers of Congress and after three presidential vetoes, that the law was actually implemented.⁵⁰

During this period, the Atlantic shipping companies intensified and refined their lobbying strategies. As a result of the boom in the written press, the importance of public opinion came increasingly to the fore. In addition to lobbyists in Washington, the shipping cartels also employed journalists whose task it was to convince the wider public of the advantages of a liberal migration policy through their newspapers and magazines. In order to make public opinion even more tangible for politicians, the shipping companies promoted associations that defended the interests of different migrant communities, as well as overarching associations that transcended ethnic borders. Mass demonstrations, the writing of personal letters to members of Congress

and the sending of delegations to Washington whenever migration laws were being debated were all used as methods to apply pressure. The shipping cartels also increasingly hid behind this populist cover, as suspicion of their monopoly-like structures and their influence on policy continued to grow. In the immigration debate, the employers and railroad companies usually acted as allies of the shipping companies, while the trade unions and various xenophobic groups were their most important opponents.⁵¹

The xenophobes gradually succeeded in their efforts to have their racist ideas applied more strictly at American ports of entry. The list of 'undesirables' was extended to include anarchists, polygamists, pimps, prostitutes, people with disabilities and those suffering from certain diseases. On Ellis Island, the New York immigration station at which over 80 % of the registered European immigrants arrived, the existing laws and checks were applied much more strictly to people from eastern and southern Europe. Although only one to two percent of all European migrants were refused, they mostly came from these 'less desirable' regions. To avoid this risk of refusal, people began to dodge the

checks. Some did this by using false American citizenship papers. Others tried to enter as cabin passengers, stowaways or sailors, only to desert from their ships on arrival. Yet others opted for the indirect route via Canada and Mexico, in the hope of passing unnoticed over America's long and often ungarded land boundaries. This led to the developments of illegal migration routes, many of which are still in use today.⁵²

The First World War and the collapse of trans-Atlantic passenger transport

As a result of the sudden outbreak of the Great War in 1914, migrant transportation was seriously disrupted with almost immediate effect. Some ships in foreign waters were no longer able to reach their home ports. Many other passenger vessels were requisitioned for the war effort. After a time, the Allies and the neutral powers were eventually able to provide a regular trans-Atlantic service during war years, and several Red Star Line ships were transferred to the American Line to serve on their routes. Due to the heightened demand for shipping space for the transportation of goods, these ships made large profits. On the other hand, passenger traffic slumped as a result of the many restrictions on mobility and migration. Even so, hundreds of thousands of migrants still found their way to America during the early years of the conflict. It was only when the US joined the war in 1917 that trans-Atlantic passenger traffic came to a complete standstill. The pro-immigration movement disintegrated and the shipping lobby crumbled, while the ethnic pressure groups, above all the influential German community, lost any influence they had once had. American nationalism was rampant and the anti-immigration groups were able to successfully exploit this.⁵³

The reading test finally became a legal requirement, but the advocates of immigration restrictions did not content themselves with this. They exploited their wartime momentum to introduce fixed annual quotas, which governed migrant access to the US by nationality. Once again, these quotas were weighted heavily against the peoples from eastern and southern Europe and in favour of immigrants from northern and western Europe. Freedom of movement between the two continents was effectively brought to an end. For this reason, after 1918 the passenger lines were forced more than ever to direct their efforts on the emerging tourism sector. However, pleasure and business voyages could not offset the strong decline in migrant transport. Despite the reforming of the shipping cartel, an increasingly large number of shipping companies found themselves in difficulties. The stock market crash of 1929 sounded the death knell for many of these companies. In the space of less than four years, world trading shrunk to a third of its volume. Migration streams came to a virtual standstill all around the world. Its American investors decid-



American soldiers aboard the 'Kroonland' during the First World War, circa 1917, Friends of the Red Star Line, Antwerp

ed to allow the Red Star Line to go into liquidation and used the opportunities presented by the New Deal to reinvest their capital in their homeland. Migrant shipping experienced a small revival after the Second World War, but it was short-lived. The rapid development of air transport soon came to dominate overseas passenger transport flows. Only a handful of passenger shipping companies were able to survive this difficult transition. HAPAG-Lloyd threw itself into goods traffic. The Holland Amerika Lijn and Cunard Line are still active today in the cruise sector. But for many other companies, such as the Red Star Line, it was the end of the road. But they were destined to live on as iconic reminders of the European mass migration that shaped the Atlantic world during the open border period.⁵⁴